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INFORMATION
March 11, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: John H. Holdridge

SUBJECT: March 10 Meeting Inter-Agency Ad Hoc Group on Laos

I attach a brief summary of the proceedings of the Ad Hoc Group Meeting on Laos.

The most interesting features of the meeting were these:

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State Dept. review completed

-- Personnel. Our Mission in Vientiane wants a total of 61 new personnel slots, primarily to support the increased level of air activity. It was agreed that Defense should query its people in Vientiane, pointing to the political sensitivity of personnel increases and asking whether other personnel slots can be traded off to meet the Mission's needs. (An increase would of course require a Presidential decision.)

MORI/CDF per C05139239

-- The Chinese Road. It was agreed to consider again on Thursday whether we are now in a position to do anything further on the plan to put guerrilla units in the way of Chinese road building.

Note: At the time of the meeting, we had no authoritative text of Souvanna's press conference statement about Chinese road-building, and it appeared that no record had been made of the alleged statement. We have since received from Vientiane a transcript of Souvanna's remarks, taken from a tape of the press conference. He is more equivocal than we had hoped.

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

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Asked whether there was a written agreement for construction of a road beyond Muong Sai toward the Mekong, he said: "There is only our joint communique that was published concerning the extension of the Phong Saly road in the direction of the South of Laos. That is to say towards Muong Sai and Luang Prabang." Asked whether this agreement covered the present construction toward Pak Beng, he said: "No, no. We have questioned the Chinese Charge d'affaires on this matter and he does not recognize the existence of this road." The question we will face on Thursday is whether this fuzzy statement is sufficient and sufficiently public evidence that there is no outstanding request for Chinese road construction.

Att.

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INTER-AGENCY AD HOC GROUP ON LAOS MEETING

MARCH 10, 1970

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1. Intelligence. [REDACTED] Souvanna expressed elation at the President's March 6 statement, saying that this unequivocal public assertion of support strengthened his hand with the Congress. He and other RLG officials have indicated that they have hopes of engaging soon in talks with the Pathet Lao.

Militarily, there are no signs of enemy movement west of Muong Soui toward the Vientiane/Luang Prabang road. The enemy is probing Vang Pao's outer defenses, and pressure against Vang Pao is expected. Farther south, some three NVA battalions are operating east of Faksane, and a captured notebook suggests that their purpose is to tie down troops by diversionary tactics in that area.

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4. Personnel Requirements. The military in Vientiane want 55 additional positions for aircraft maintenance and operation plus 6 other positions. The political sensitivity of any staff increase in Vientiane was discussed, and DOD was asked to query the field to ask how many new jobs are considered absolutely essential and whether the slots could be made available by economies elsewhere in Laos. (This request, if it materializes, clearly will have to go to the President.)

5. Political and Military Initiatives. It was agreed on Thursday to discuss a draft paper on possible U.S. actions and positions with respect to the various political initiatives in the air. It was further agreed that sustained Communist military pressure may put Vang Pao under very heavy inducement to pack up his Meo followers and move westward. Such a move would bring the Communists much closer to Vientiane and would probably bring about a crisis in the RLG. It was agreed to examine whether any further military action, in addition to those already taken, would be justified.

6. The Numbers Game. Lindsey Grant mentioned that any reference to numbers in Laos must be consistent with the figures used by the President and Dr. Kissinger, and that no updating and changes should be taken unilaterally.

(BEGIN RESTRICTED SESSION)

7. The Chinese Road.

Some Chinese cadres have been sent back to Yunnan, reinforcing the evidence that the Chinese are not pressing road construction at this time. On the other hand, enemy movements between Muong Houn and the Thai border show that the Communists are attempting systematically to clear out any RLG presence in that area.

Jonathan Moore noted that Souvanna has yet to make the requested public clarification that there is no outstanding RLG request for road construction. His remark to Ambassador Godley as to what he had said at a recent press conference was itself equivocal, and none of the correspondents present picked it up or put it on the record, nor did he include it in the official report of the press conference. Under these circumstances, we could either

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(a) go ahead with the planned exercise south of Muong Houn without requiring any RLG statement, or (b) continue to require the clarification, or (c) reconsider the whole offer in light of changed circumstances. Lindsey Grant suggested that the third alternative was probably ruled out, given the President's recent instruction. It was agreed to come to a recommendation on Thursday.

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